

THE CLEVELAND
MUSEUM OF ART
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Director
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THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS PHOTOGRAPHS BY NAN
COULTER: *WAR DECOR: PHOTOGRAPHS OF AMERICA*

May 22 - July 19, 1992
Photography Gallery 105

Nan Coulter's *War Decor, Photographs of America*, opening May 22 at The Cleveland Museum of Art, offers a fresh perspective on what has become a long tradition in journalistic photography: the documentation of war. In January, 1991, while the intense media coverage of the conflict in the Persian Gulf supplied the public with a megadose of high-tech imagery from the remote deserts of Saudi Arabia, the darkened streets of Jerusalem, and the glaring skies above Iraq, Dallas freelance photographer Nan Coulter (b. 1943) began to roam the cities and towns of her native Southwest, documenting the reaction at home. She was especially drawn to the variations in people's use of common public symbols to try to communicate their personal feelings about the far-away events.

Accordingly, these often poignant photographs are full of homemade patriotic posters, yellow ribbons, and, of course, stars and stripes—the universality of these symbols given a human dimension by the obvious strength of feeling behind each display of support. But Ms. Coulter's work does more than record the expressions of emotion individual people feel for loved ones in danger; it presents as well the way in which a single issue can pervade the thoughts of an entire society. Concern about the war is expressed in as many ways as there are people—blatant, subtle, serious, whimsical, for, against. Flags hang from poles and in windows, billboards and bumper stickers proclaim support, and yellow ribbons seem to spring up almost anywhere like opportunistic vegetation—while most criticism seems to appear in the form of angry graffiti sprayed on walls and bridge abutments. These photographs reflect the whole spectrum of symbolic response to the war. This exhibition was organized by Tom Hinson, curator of contemporary art.